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Abstract

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Onomastic interferences in Lycia: Greek reinterpretation of Lycian personal names

As is well known, Lycia, located on the south-western coast of Asia Minor, was a multicultural and polyglossian area, especially during the second half of the 1st millennium B.C. From the 4th century B.C. onwards — that is before Alexander's conquests — Greek writing and language became more and more predominant in that region, as a language of prestige, to the detriment of Lycian, which is an Anatolian language related to Luwian and Hittite.

Although most of the indigenous personal names persisted in Lycia until the first centuries A.D., as evidenced by their large number found in Greek inscriptions from the Hellenistic and Roman periods, some of them underwent a little transformation in order to look like Greek names. This process, which is common in a context of language contact, consists in adopting a homophonic or phonetically similar name or element of the name, called “cover name” or, in French, “nom d’assonance” (see Dondin-Payre and Raepsaet-Charlier 2001; Coşkun and Zeidler 2005). One famous example of this type of onomastic adaptation from one language to another is the name of the Mede general who invaded Asia Minor, known in the Greek sources as Ἄρπαγος (Harpagos): the underlying Iranian name is derived from the adjective arba- “small, young” (cf. Sanskrit arbha-) with the hypocoristic suffix -ka-, but it has been slightly modified in its Greek adaptation in order to get it closer to the Greek substantive ἀρπαγή (harpagē) “pillaging”, so the enemy conqueror is reduced to a simple plunderer. I intend to present and discuss some Lycian names adapted as cover names in Greek, like Purihimeti ~ Πυριβάτης, with a second element -βάτης (-batēs), cf. verb βαίνω (bainō) “to walk”, and well attested in typical Greek personal names (Bechtel 1917: 92). The other names that will be interpreted are Kuprille/i- ~ Κοπριλῖς (Koprilis), cf. Κοπρύλος (Koprulos), but also Κύβερνις (Kubernis), Mizu- ~ Μεσος (Mesos), cf. μέσος (mesos) “middle”, and Xddazada- ~ Κτασασας (Ktasadas), cf. Κτᾱσι- / Κτησι- (Ktāsi- / Ktēsi-).